

Los Angeles County
Museum of Art

Seventeenth-
Century Dutch
and Flemish Art

Gallery Guide

Because the works of art shown in the galleries are sometimes changed, certain works discussed here may not be on view at the present time.

The artistic traditions of seventeenth-century Holland and Flanders (modern Netherlands, Belgium, and parts of France) should be considered separately from those of the rest of Europe during the Baroque age, due to unique political, religious, and social factors. During the sixteenth century this region was under the domination of the Hapsburgs, the ruling family of Spain and Austria, which imposed Catholicism on the largely Calvinist population and demanded that its considerable trade revenues be shared with Spain. This harsh treatment incited rebellions that resulted in independence for only a portion of the area. The northern region established peace with Spain in 1609 as the autonomous United Provinces — Holland being the largest — while Flanders remained under Spanish control.

This political division created two different settings for artists and patrons. In the north, which prospered as a result of Dutch maritime superiority and colonial possessions, citizens from all strata of society acquired images that reflected the country's wealth. Artists responded to this demand by producing landscapes, seascapes, still lifes, genre pictures, history paintings, and portraits. These "specialty" paintings are a hallmark of seventeenth-century Dutch art and exhibit a high degree of realism that tells us much about the period. Calvinist doctrine forbade the decoration of churches, so religious pictures were not in demand, although many were painted for private patrons. Subjects from ancient history and literature also fell out of favor, but this did not stop artists from treating popular mythological themes.

In Flanders a different artistic climate prevailed. The Catholic Church and the aristocracy granted major commissions for subjects taken from biblical or classical sources. Artists such as Peter Paul Rubens and his most successful student, Anthony van Dyck, achieved great wealth and status for their service to European rulers. The nature of Flemish patronage also accounts in part for the large number and high quality of religious paintings and portraits that are among the masterpieces of seventeenth-century Flemish art.



Pieter Lastman

Holland, 1583–1633

Hagar and the Angel

1614

Oil on panel

20 x 26 $\frac{7}{8}$ in. (50.8 x 68.3 cm)

Purchased with funds provided by The Ahmanson Foundation, Mr. and Mrs.

Stewart Resnick, Anna Bing Arnold,

Dr. Armand Hammer, and Edward Carter

in honor of Kenneth Donahue, M.85.117

Pieter Lastman was the most important artist in Amsterdam in the generation preceding Rembrandt. Lastman visited Italy in 1603–4 and saw the art of Caravaggio, which led him to abandon the artificiality of Mannerism in favor of naturalistic detail and narrative clarity. By 1607 he had returned to Amsterdam, where he ran a prosperous studio in which many artists were trained, including Rembrandt himself.

Hagar and the Angel is an example of the small, carefully composed, and brilliantly rendered religious picture that gained Lastman his reputation. It depicts the appearance of an angel to Hagar, the slave whom Abraham had banished, along with their son, Ishmael, to the wilds of Beersheba (Genesis 21:9–21). Mother and child were dying of thirst, when an angel appeared, revealing a source of water and God's plan for Ishmael to found a great nation.

The exchange between Hagar and the angel is conveyed by the artist through pose, glance, and gesture. Lastman contrasts the

forward-moving, energetic form of the angel with the limp, nearly lifeless body of the despairing Hagar. The fruitful vine behind Hagar may be an allusion both to the presence of water and to the fate of Ishmael revealed by God's messenger.



Hendrick de Keyser

Holland, 1565–1621

Bust of a Crying Child

c. 1615

Bronze

Height 12 $\frac{3}{8}$ in. (32.1 cm)

Purchased with funds provided

by James E. Clark, M.84.37

Compared with the output of two-dimensional art during the seventeenth century in the Netherlands, only a relatively small amount of sculpture was produced. The Protestant Church did not sanction sculptural decoration, nor did the government often erect monuments. As a result, some Dutch sculptors spent their entire careers in Italy, southern Germany, or Prague. Hendrick de Keyser remained in his homeland, however, and became the city architect of Amsterdam and the leading sculptor in Holland in the early seventeenth century.

Bust of a Crying Child is related to de Keyser's most important public sculpture, the tomb of William the Silent in the Nieuwe Kerk in Delft. On the cornice of the tomb

is seated a weeping child bearing two torches. The attribution of the museum's bust to de Keyser is partially based on a comparison of the two figures. This is not a lovely putto but a human baby captured in mid-scream, expressing its displeasure as only a child can. De Keyser turned to bronze sculpture when he was nearly fifty years old; before this he had worked mainly in stone. Here he shows himself to be a master of naturalistic detail used for expressive purposes.



Rembrandt Harmensz van Rijn
Holland, 1606–1669

The Raising of Lazarus

c. 1630
Oil on panel
37 $\frac{1}{16}$ x 32 in. (96.4 x 81.3 cm)
Gift of H. F. Ahmanson and Company
in memory of Howard F. Ahmanson,
M.72.67.2

Rembrandt van Rijn was born in the university town of Leiden, where he studied for three years before being apprenticed to Pieter Lastman in Amsterdam in 1622. Six months later he returned to Leiden, established his own studio, and began painting historical subjects in the style of his teacher. Toward the end of the 1620s he came under the spell of artists who had been to Italy and were employing Caravaggio's dramatic use of light and shadow. The play of light over form would become one of Rembrandt's most powerful expressive tools.

This is apparent in *The Raising of Lazarus*, an early religious work that helped to establish the artist's

career. The subject, taken from John 11:38–44, was treated by Rembrandt in several media. As one of the most spectacular of Christ's miracles — reviving a man who had been dead for four days — the story lent itself to pictorial representation. In the painting Lazarus rises from his grave in response to Christ's powerful gesture, intense concentration, and cry of "Lazarus, come forth." The mysterious, dramatic light underscores the miraculous link between Christ and Lazarus and illuminates the faces of the awestruck spectators, among whom we count ourselves.



Rembrandt Harmensz van Rijn
Holland, 1606–1669

Portrait of Marten Looten

1632
Oil on panel
36 $\frac{1}{2}$ x 30 in. (92.7 x 76.2 cm)
Gift of J. Paul Getty, 53.50.3

Throughout his career Rembrandt painted many portraits of Dutch merchants and tradespeople. Part of the artist's greatness lies in the fact that he was able to create on a two-dimensional surface the essence of a human being. Marten Looten was a successful grain merchant in Amsterdam and was forty-six years old at the time he commissioned this picture. Painted in 1632, this is one of Rembrandt's first commissions and contributed to his reputation as a portraitist.

The painting shows a dignified individual in a formal pose: one hand grips a document that

records his name, the date, the initials *RHL* (for *Rembrandt Harmensz Leidenensis*, or Rembrandt, son of Harmen, of Leiden), and other words that have not yet been deciphered. The artist has given substance to the figure by placing it at a three-quarter angle. Light plays across Looten's face, which hints at a character that is thoughtful and responsible, industrious and gentle. Even in a formal portrait the artist goes beyond the trappings of the prosperous citizen to let us glimpse the inner qualities of the man.



Frans Hals

Holland, 1581/85–1666

Portrait of a Man (Pieter Tjarck)

c. 1635–38

Oil on canvas

33 $\frac{3}{16}$ x 27 $\frac{1}{2}$ in. (85.2 x 69.9 cm)

Gift of The Ahmanson Foundation,
M.74.31

Frans Hals was born in the Flemish city of Antwerp and moved with his family, who sought religious freedom, to Haarlem in 1591. Little is known of his early life, but he may have studied with Carel van Mander. Hals became Haarlem's most famous portrait painter, receiving commissions from clergymen, scholars, wealthy merchants, and civic groups. Unlike Rembrandt, who painted portraits as well as many other subjects, Hals was a specialist.

While the identity of this sitter is not absolutely certain, an eighteenth-century French inscription on the back includes the name *Pierre Tiarck*. The Haarlem archives record the marriage in 1634 of Pieter Dircksz Tjarck and Maria Claesdr Larp. Hals's portrait of a woman identified as Maria Larp is in the National Gallery in London. The pictures are nearly identical in size, and in each the sitter is lit from the left and seen through an illusionistic frame. Scholars surmise that these are pendant portraits, commissioned in celebration of the couple's marriage. The rose that dangles from Tjarck's fingers is a traditional symbol of love and supports the idea that the two portraits belong together.

Hals excelled in the naturalistic treatment of his sitters. Tjarck is presented in a relaxed pose, his arm resting on the back of his chair. The artist used bold, impressionistic brushwork to establish highlights, define forms, and bring life to the two-dimensional surface.



Carel Fabritius

Holland, 1622–1654

Mercury and Argus

c. 1645–47

Oil on canvas

28 $\frac{15}{16}$ x 40 $\frac{15}{16}$ in. (73.5 x 104 cm)

Gift of The Ahmanson Foundation,
M.90.20

Carel Fabritius was born on the outskirts of Amsterdam in Midden-Beemster. His father was a Calvinist schoolteacher and amateur painter who may have given Fabritius his first art lessons. In 1641 the young artist went to Amsterdam and

began to work in the studio of Rembrandt. Nine years later he moved to Delft and became a member of the painters' Guild of Saint Luke, but after four years his life ended tragically when his studio was destroyed by the explosion of the town arsenal on October 12, 1654. *Mercury and Argus* is one of only twelve paintings securely attributable to his hand and a rare example of the depiction of a mythological episode in Dutch art.

The story of Mercury and Argus is told by Ovid in book 1 of his *Metamorphoses*. The god Jupiter became the lover of the nymph Io, and, to conceal her from his wife, Juno, he turned her into a white heifer. Undeceived, Juno ordered Argus, a shepherd with a hundred eyes, to guard Io. At Jupiter's command, the god Mercury, disguised as a goatherd, lulled Argus to sleep with music and beheaded him.

Fabritius shows Mercury confirming that Argus is asleep. Limiting his palette to earth tones, the artist used descriptively tactile, grainy paint to heighten the rusticity of the scene. The transformation of Mercury into a bumpkin, the dirty feet of Argus, and the rambunctious goats make this earthy depiction a radical departure from the classical theme.

In western art a landscape was not deemed appropriate as the subject of a painting until the seventeenth century. The Dutch in particular made landscape painting a genre in its own right, giving special emphasis to times of day, seasons of the year, and the weather conditions so visible over their flat terrain. An important center for Dutch landscape painting was Haarlem, the birthplace of Jacob van Ruisdael, son of the painter Isaac and nephew of another celebrated landscape painter, Salomon van Ruysdael, also represented in the museum's collection. Jacob studied briefly with his father and the landscapist Cornelius Vroom and was admitted to the Haarlem guild of painters in 1648. Ruisdael surpassed his contemporaries in his powers of expression and the ability to render in paint the transience of the natural world.

In *Landscape with Dunes* Ruisdael shows us the sandy, wind-swept country outside Haarlem that appears in so many of his canvases. He is a master at creating atmospheric effects of a cloudy day. One almost expects to see the light in the picture change as the wind pushes the billowing storm front across the sky. The artist anchors the movement of the composition by centering it around two large trees, one full of foliage, the other with bare, skeletal branches against the gray sky. The meandering river and curved path lead the eye into the middle distance, where two walking figures can be seen. Here Ruisdael seems to suggest the insignificance of humankind in comparison with the grandeur of nature.



Jacob van Ruisdael

Holland, 1628/29–1682

Landscape with Dunes

1649

Oil on oak panel

20% x 26% in. (52.4 x 67.6 cm)

Gift of Dorothy G. Sullivan,

M.75.138



Abraham van Beyeren

Holland, 1620/21–1690

Banquet Still Life

1667

Oil on canvas

55½ x 48 in. (141 x 121.9 cm)

Gift of The Ahmanson Foundation,

M.86.96

The prosperity of the Netherlands in the seventeenth century created a demand for sumptuous still-life paintings that reflected Dutch affluence. Artists specialized in certain types of still lifes, for example, flower paintings, breakfast settings, *trompe-l'oeil* (literally, "fool the eye"), and *pronkstilleven* (ostentatious still life). In the second half of the century Abraham van Beyeren was the foremost painter of lavish, large-scale *pronkstilleven*. He was born in The Hague and traveled throughout Holland, living at various times in Alkmaar, Delft, Amsterdam, and Overschie. Van Beyeren was significantly influenced by the still-life painter Jan Davidsz de Heem, whose *Still Life with Oysters and Grapes* of 1653 hangs nearby.

In this *Banquet Still Life* Van Beyeren sets before us a dazzling display of serving utensils, exotic fruits, and other riches. The marbleized table is covered with an oriental rug, laden with objects of silver, glass, and ceramic, and brimming with the luscious bounty of earth and sea.

Almost all Dutch still-life paintings were intended to have a moralizing aspect that went hand-in-hand with their celebration of life's riches. They inevitably con-

tained one or two objects that were symbolic of human vanity and the transitory quality of material abundance. These symbols of *vanitas* included hand-mirrors, snuffed candles, pocket watches, skulls, and butterflies. In *Banquet Still Life* the little mouse, seen at center silhouetted against a bright peach, is a symbol of decay, and the pocket watch, a symbol of temperance, also reminds us that with the passing of time all things will break, spoil, or perish.



Jan Steen

Holland, 1626–1679

Samson and Delilah

1668

Oil on canvas

26½ x 32½ in. (67.3 x 82.6 cm)

Gift of The Ahmanson Foundation,

M.87.64

Jan Steen came from Leiden and, according to various sources, studied with Nicolaes Knupfer, Adriaen van Ostade, or Jan van Goyen. Steen is best known for comic scenes of chaotic households or raucous taverns, such as *The Twelfth Night*, also in the museum's collection. Although these depictions of outrageous hedonism seem to mock the prevailing Calvinist codes of modesty and morality, Steen's intention was not to promote licentious pursuits but rather to warn viewers of their hazards.

Steen also painted many historical and religious subjects. *Samson and Delilah* depicts a moment from the Old Testament story (Judges 16:4–31) in which the Hebrew hero Samson is foiled by his enemies, the Philistines. A man of

superhuman physical strength, Samson revealed the secret of his power to the beautiful Delilah, who had been paid to destroy him. As he slept with his head in her lap, she called forth her co-conspirators to cut his hair, the source of his might. This act of betrayal is Steen's chosen subject. Bereft of strength, Samson was seized, blinded, and imprisoned in Gaza, where he was forced to turn a millstone (a painting of this subject by French artist Georges Rouault is in Gallery 211). When Samson's hair grew back, his strength also returned, and he avenged himself by pulling down a temple and killing three thousand Philistines, although he died with them. The story of Samson as a savior of the Jews was viewed in Christian theology as a direct prefiguration of Christ's mission on earth.

Steen's interest in the theater is reflected in the broad gestures of his characters, the red drapery swag, the platform on which the action takes place, and the costumes. True to his love of the commonplace, Steen includes a still life on the table and the vignette of two boys teasing a little dog.



Gerard ter Borch

Holland, 1617–1681

The Card Players

c. 1659

Oil on canvas mounted on panel

18 $\frac{3}{8}$ x 14 $\frac{1}{2}$ in. (46.7 x 36.8 cm)

Mr. and Mrs. Allan C. Balch Collection,

M.44.2.7

Genre paintings (scenes of interiors or of daily life) were in great demand among the Dutch middle class. These small pictures of secular subjects fit comfortably into people's homes and reflected the customs and clothing of the time. Gerard ter Borch, a portraitist and one of the most prominent genre painters, was born in Zwolle to a wealthy family. He studied art informally under his father, an amateur painter, and was apprenticed to Pieter Molijn in Haarlem. Ter Borch's financial security allowed him to travel extensively in England, Italy, France, Germany, and Spain.

In *The Card Players* three figures in elegant clothing sit in a typical Dutch interior that is luxurious without being ostentatious. The map at the rear, the rich gold frame on the painting at the left, and the cloth-covered table on which a silver plate, glass demi-john, and goblet are placed are all characteristic of a well-to-do Dutch home of the period. Ter Borch is a master at rendering texture, such as the smooth satin of the dress of the lady on the left and the fur around her shoulders. Card playing was a popular bourgeois pastime despite the fact that the Calvinist Church did not approve of it. The particular game between the two young ladies, one of whom is assisted by a cavalier, has not been identified, but it may be related to fortune-telling.



David Teniers the Younger

Flanders, 1610–1690

and **Jan Davidsz de Heem**

Holland, 1606–1684

An Artist in His Studio

1643

Oil on oak panel

19 x 25¼ in. (48.3 x 64.1 cm)

Gift of H. F. Ahmanson and Company
in memory of Howard F. Ahmanson,
M.72.67.1

David Teniers the Younger was born in Antwerp, where he trained under his father, a minor painter and art dealer. Best known for his genre scenes of guardrooms and taverns, Teniers was an extremely productive and popular artist whose works were often copied or imitated.

An Artist in His Studio was painted when Teniers was at the height of his career. It was previously titled *Kitchen Interior*, due, no doubt, to the profusion of food and utensils piled in one corner of the room. Closer observation revealed that the objects are being prepared for use in a still life. The cloth in the upper left corner is draped as though to modify incoming light, and the man in the fur cap (possibly Teniers himself) holds a mahlstick, a tool used to steady the painter's hand, and directs his assistant in the arranging of the objects.

The still-life portion of the picture was painted by a Dutch artist working in Antwerp, Jan Davidsz de Heem, the foremost still-life painter of his time. Teniers often shared the canvas with other artists, each painting his specialty, but this is a rare instance of his working with the celebrated de Heem, who did not often collaborate.



Peter Paul Rubens

Flanders, 1577–1640

The Holy Family with the Dove

c. 1609

Oil on panel

54½ x 47½ in. (138.4 x 120.7 cm)

Colonel and Mrs. George J. Denis Fund,
53.27

Peter Paul Rubens established himself as an artist in Antwerp in the late 1590s but left in 1600 for Italy, where he enjoyed the patronage of the dukes of Mantua. In Italy he absorbed Renaissance traditions through study of the works of Michelangelo and Titian, as well as new developments in art being advanced by his contemporaries, the Carracci and Caravaggio. Rubens's bold, exuberant style synthesizes these currents, but it is wholly his own. He was highly acclaimed at many courts in Europe, serving the monarchs of Spain, England, and France, and the Spanish governors of Flanders. Rubens was not only the most important Flemish painter in the early seventeenth century, he was also an art dealer, a learned classicist, and a diplomat in the service of his royal patrons.

In *The Holy Family with the Dove* the Christ Child is balanced in his mother's lap, playfully holding a dove just out of reach of his cousin, John the Baptist. Joseph looks on, as does an older woman, who may be Anne, the mother of the Virgin Mary, or Elizabeth, the mother of John. Rubens's swirling composition and interlocking forms draw us into the picture. Bold color

and fluid brushwork animate the large figures. Rubens transforms the dove, a symbol of the Holy Spirit, into an object of delight for the two small boys. The painting is one of the artist's major early works and is probably the first of many variants of this subject executed during his long career.



Anthony van Dyck

Flanders, 1599–1641

Andromeda Chained to the Rock

1637–38

Oil on canvas

84¾ x 52 in. (215.3 x 132.1 cm)

Gift of The Ahmanson Foundation,

M.85.80

Anthony van Dyck was born in Antwerp and in 1618 became an assistant in the studio of Rubens. From 1621 to 1628 van Dyck lived in Italy, working in Genoa, Rome, and Venice, where he was profoundly affected by the art of the Renaissance master Titian. Van Dyck became one of the most successful and distinguished painters of the seventeenth century and like his mentor enjoyed the patronage of the major courts of Europe, painting religious pictures as well as portraits. In 1632 he was called to England by King Charles I, who

knighted him the next year. Van Dyck remained in England thereafter, except for brief trips to the continent, and enjoyed the exclusive right to paint the monarch and the royal family.

Andromeda Chained to the Rock was painted while van Dyck was in England. The subject was popular among many artists in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, including Titian, Rembrandt, and Rubens; in fact, van Dyck owned Titian's version. As the story is told in book 4 of Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, the princess Andromeda was to be sacrificed to save her father's kingdom from a terrible sea monster, but she was saved at the last minute by the hero Perseus. Van Dyck's portrayal is most unusual in that he places all the compositional focus on the glowing nude. Perseus and his winged steed, Pegasus, are a mere speck in the distance, and the monster is hardly menacing. The model for Andromeda was van Dyck's mistress, Margaret Lemon, and it is likely that the painting was intended for the private collection of the artist or the model.

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